





# i magazine

## 2003

i magazine is a student literary publication of  
Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner, Massachusetts

*This one, with gratitude for  
Arthur Marley  
for 33 years of inspiration  
and roads not taken ~*

*i magazine*

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I'm always on the edge,  
There's always a doubt,  
A whisper in my mind.  
Precious few times I've felt completely happy,  
But  
I've never been completely without hope.  
I can always write  
To reveal what I feel  
A fragile lifeline at best,  
But hey,  
I'll take what I can.

~Timothy Hartigan

## table of contents

timothy hartigan	poem	frontpiece
john beaulieu	if you hate me for this, you're stupid	1
nancy young	she	3
christine casella	spring	4
jonathan p. caufield	camden	5
eileen torni	sixteen minutes	8
david rainville	grand canyon	9
gerry garcia	tophet	12
leah jablonski	in the manner of angels	13
leah jablonski	poem	13
mi ran kim	bean sprout	14
katherine wool	an absinthe drinker's sobriety test	15
elieen torni	lady slipper	18
aaron ufema	e pluribus unum	19
berecca anne	my prison	25
andrew kolodziej	for once then, something	26
stacie tanzella	poem	26
david blais	the s-train	27
mittchell collins	poem	30
jared robinson	death threats and pizza sauce	32
john beaulieu	beauty	33
eileen torni	conquer	34
john beaulieu	winter	35
ellen mc gahan	another change of season	36
aaron ufema	man in the moon	37
john beaulieu	late night	42



## If you hate me for this you're an idiot

A lot of things have happened in the world recently. Some people will tell you that they happened *to* the world, because we're all in one united community. I disagree with that philosophy completely. Here's the story of an uneventful day I had once. That day was September 11, 2001. If I was just a little cockier I'd advise you to buckle up for the bumpy ride, but if you ask any girl I've been with they'll tell you an over abundance of cockiness is not a problem I have.

September 11 was the second day of the school semester. I had missed the first day when I got lost on the road and ended up somehow at a bookstore. The bookstore was closed. That wasn't a good day for me.

On the next school day, I made it to school with time to spare. I decided to reward myself with a coke and some pretzel and cheese combos. I actually still have the receipt. I'll never forget where I was on that fateful day or the crunchy snack treats that I experienced. I went to a secluded corner of the cafeteria to indulge myself in my snack and to plug my computer in the school electricity to watch a DVD. A couple of years ago, I said I didn't see DVDs taking over. I'm man enough to admit when I'm wrong.

I spent a more than fair amount of time in my own little world this way. My headphones were on and I was alone. What I watched was a collection of the best of favorite TV sitcoms. At the moment the episode was the one where the guy's inability to choose between two insanely beautiful women who were in love with him led to a comic misunderstanding. I love science fiction. I leaned my chair over and noticed that the tables were a lot more crowded than they were before. People seemed to be very interested in the TV. When the episode ended, I decided to join humanity.

They were watching the news. There was a burning building on the screen. Nothing you haven't seen there a million times before on the film at 11. But this was an American building. That made all the difference apparently. We were told that we had been hit in an unchivalrous way and that terrorist elements were suspected. I had one defining thought at that moment. "I really picked the wrong time to start reading a Tom Clancy book."

Do you remember a few years back when American planes accidentally dropped bombs onto a Chinese embassy? My personal favorite talk show host joked about how the guidance



systems must have been made by the idiots at a certain company he enjoyed making fun of. I guess you can only laugh at death when it isn't happening to you. In a certain way of looking at things that actually makes a lot of sense.

Everyone watched the footage until we were herded outside of the building. The outside was a mixture of cell phones and cigarette smoke. I know one of the secrets of non-fiction is to never go to absolutes, but I don't think there was anyone there who smoked who wasn't right then. Even in the open outside air it seemed to cause a small haze. I used my phone to call my father, who works in a federal building, to see if he was okay. By the way, he was fine and everyone was evacuated. After that I called my sister to tell her dad was okay. My niece who was two at the time said something very meaningful to me. My sister said it was, "Thank God you're okay." But to me it sounded more like "Come home on a choo choo train." She's a brilliant kid, which is precisely why I favor my translation over her mother's.

I finally made my way home. For some reason, I expected heavy traffic. But there was hardly any. The radio was of course on the news. There was no music. Afterwards music itself came under attack. The forbidden songs were basically anything that mentioned death, explosions, airplanes, knives, religion, gravity, fire, New York, morning, the month of September or Tuesday. But "Rock the Kasbah" was played to death. Go figure.

When I got home I watched the news. My parents arrived home and we filled each other in on what we heard and saw. We all watched then. After the shock, there were political leaders talking about how we will overcome the evil as a nation. Religious leaders talked about how we will overcome the heathens. The overall message of the event was celebrating the kind of proud independence and freedom you only have when you're a loyal patriot who's also a humble servant eternally bound to the Lord. This made up for the jokes no one was willing to tell. Personally, I just missed the music. I don't care what anyone else says, it's when you can't laugh or sing that the bad guys win. I hooked up my headphones again. I don't speak for any group that any people define themselves by. I wasn't a part of any of that. No one had defeated me.

~John Beaulieu

## She

over hot cocoa she sits  
speaking with her friends  
she is speaking  
they talk about their week  
laughing at one story  
she is laughing  
they finish their drinks  
agreeing that it was a good night  
she is agreeing  
they pay and leave  
then decide to talk a walk  
she is walking  
they talk about the past  
reminiscing about the past  
she is reminiscing  
an old friend bumps into them  
they are happy to see her  
she is happy  
it is time to go home  
they wave goodbye  
she is waving  
they each reach their homes  
and fall asleep smiling  
she is crying

~Nancy Young

## Spring

Warm air and sun glistening on a spring day  
The glow of your face reflected in the water below  
Birds chirp in a sweet melodic tune  
Fishes swim silently under green ripples

Trees sway in the brisk breeze saying hello  
Grass turning from light brown to apple green  
Children laughing and playing outdoors  
Older folks attend to their almost forgotten plants

Light of day slips into the darkness of night  
Leaving more time for walks on the road  
And for ice cream in t-shirts and shorts  
Leaves rustle at night and put me to sleep

Sun bursting with vibrant orange and sparkling yellow  
Sky a glorious baby blue  
Clouds move slowly against the world  
And we are enjoying a beautiful spring day

~Christine Casella

## Camden

He stands with his back towards the cold Atlantic, his left hand held at right angle to his body, fingers wrapped against the peeling paint of the wooden railing. He stands straight with his old, salt stained cap pulled down over his brow, the wrinkled brow of middle age he found yesterday standing in front of his bathroom mirror. He stands this morning, his ears deaf to the push and pull breath of water over rock; the in and out sound panning from ear to ear, giving and taking—returning leaving.

The brush in his right hand hangs tired by his side. His eyes trained at, or perhaps through, the empty, ivory canvas.

He rushes past the pile of logs that hide the snakes, oh there's one, or maybe not; he runs just the same. He runs just to be safe, and perhaps because it's more fun; a sidelong glance at the climbing tree with the knotty trunk, a mountain years before, a child's toy today. He runs past it into the stand of smooth skinned pines paired like dancers among long shadows, cutting and alternating rows of white light, tracing a pattern, off and on with a rhythm. He runs still, though clear of snakes and worry; he bounces through the trees, smiling with his head up. His eyes bright with water. He follows the mossy banks of the stream, running along the bends as far as he had been before, crossing further now, stone by stone.

His hand shakes as he pours a drink. His reflection lit across the stainless steel of the countertop. The strange old face pulled tight over cheekbones and bulging with distortion at the chin, like in the funhouse mirrors. He sits back and falls into sleep.

Waking, finishing his drink, pouring another and slowly weaving his way through the dusty old sitting room, he turns back at the foot of the stairs, remembering his brush and bottle. The creak of the old floorboards chases his steps, sounding out a dialogue into the anxious silence of the empty house.

The man is slumped in the chair, eyes closed, his shirt undone, his open mouth miming first news then sports and on and on. His son plays with small metal cars on the cool linoleum whose faded pattern is transformed into a congested city grid. He quietly mouths the sounds of starting cars or squealing tires, occasionally a high-pitched whine for the ambulance which weaves towards another smashup. His brother sits at the table intently loading caps into the pearl handled six-shooter, carefully coiling the pregnant red paper onto the metal spool. Their mother is gone, he remembers little of her; not sure anymore what is picture, dream or truth. Dad snores and shifts in his chair knocking the

folded paper, which falls in half speed, tired, like a parachute from the arm to the floor. Sister moved away, she has been gone for years.

He was uneasy, dressed in an old seersucker shirt not worn in years. He was not sure what he wanted to say, what he felt he should give-up. He wanted a drink. The small man across the table with his notepad and tape recorder had driven up from Portland that morning, his shiny red foreign car now parked next to the old sailboat in the driveway. The small man read off a list of questions he said he wanted to make sure would be all right. He spoke through his nose, peppering his questions with witty little ironies and sly references, the verbal nudge and wink of academic discourse. Nervously, self-consciously as "the artist," he fingers the edge of his glass; he doesn't like this man, doesn't like the way he acts and talks like an old friend. He isn't an old friend, his old friends are dead.

"Your art has a strong sense of place, a strong feel for nostalgia."

"Memory has ravaged the Americans of today, its cruel mechanism steals and destroys... historians avoid the pain by focusing on the past of others outside themselves...I'm forced on a daily basis to confront the same question...and to somehow, How should I say?—not seem to return towards the same answer."

"I paint for myself, I've stopped painting portraits, feelings, ideas, and scenes years ago, I only paint maps, maps without keys or labels...notes to myself...anxious fragments reborn on the canvas...headbirths."

"Do you feel that your painting is a type of therapy? Do you see a progression in your work, something that your pictures have gained lost or evolved?"

"I've lost my affection, and I feel as if I've sharpened myself; not dulled...No the losing of these traces of my emotional roots have not, as maybe traditional imagery would dictate, dulled me...These things are not ground down or pushed in...I have this daydream where everything is falling away, everything that is gone or forgotten leaving, dropping away in order...falling away and what anxious being, or form is left?... I don't know."

"I don't know what, but I'm more and more sensitive to its starkly cemented reality."

"I'm trying to describe the process...Metaphysics...no I don't really understand that... it's all personal, I'm not a writer or philosopher, I'm a painter ...the influence of the action painters and European non-objectivism, the ideas that have dictated progress in American art for the greater part of the..."

"What do you see as your legacy?"

"...art will not explain"



The small man writes quickly, his eyes betraying the calm of his taut thin mouth. He glances to his tape recorder noting with satisfaction the battery light still lit red.

Too drunk to stand he sits, where he has fallen. The man humiliated him, he will never give an interview again. He swallows and tastes the sweetness of the blood which runs from his nose. It speaks its own betrayal. Even now, he thinks, I know who is to blame.

He lay on his stomach with the grass and brush and trees above and around him. A brownish black spider works its rope from its mouth with two hairy arms. The wind blows once, and again, strong enough to bend a small twig back into the spider's web, rending the structure, collapsing it in, and onto itself. The bright sun paints the dark negative across his pink brow, pantomimed in silhouette. He holds out his hand and slowly and deliberately reaches out to the web. The dark spider stops still. With one string held between his thumb and forefinger he gently pulls the soft line taut. He holds the line against the skin of a tree. And as he pulls his hand away, the line holds tight and its facets wink in the sunlight in the tall grass. He hears his name called from beyond the trees and he runs toward home.

He stands with his back to the Atlantic, his hand grips the railing, he holds his brush loosely at his hip, his ears full with the hum of the cloudless night sky. And then his brighter shadows slide, playing across the canvas—giving light to three child-like figures in a forest turning on itself into perhaps an ocean or clearing. With careful attention the dynamic points and curves of a face rise from the flat plane, soon maybe a face smiling with recognition or body's limbs rising smoke-swirling into depth, perhaps played by traces of yellow along the eyes.

~Jonathan P. Caufield

## Sixteen Minutes

A swift sparkle of light  
A falling star, a melting thimble  
A distant windswept silver bullet  
Tumbling, scattering, fizzling  
A bright tear grazing a satin sheet  
Of soft January blue  
A frosty silence, a terrible pause,  
The hissing sound of a world holding its breath  
The echoing chasm of a heart skipping a beat  
The pictures, pricking our eyes like molten needles  
And somewhere, lost, a thousand dreams  
Sputtering, flickering, burning out  
Like the falling glitter of a dying firework  
Like the gently swaying arms of a great willow  
A billowing plume of color, fading  
An electric burst of atmosphere  
Screeching, crying, whispering  
And gone

~Eileen Torni



## Grand Canyon

I kick Bob's seat, but it doesn't stop him. Don't Argue With Priests!! I've told him, but at every airport, restaurant, casino, lounge, beach... he'd strike up controversy with any authority figure he could corner and play his logic chess game.

That morning we had woke up on the side of the desert, Peach Springs, Arizona, getting our kicks on Route 66. Dust in our hair, our mouths, throats, ears. Got up, thumbs out, soon a red Datsun, driven by a priest, pulls to a stop. Father is from the retirement community on Lake Havasu, one of Del Webb's omnipresent Southwest construction projects. Del bought the London Bridge to span the lake, had every stone numbered, shipped and reassembled for the clientele. Being a good Christian, he couldn't resist giving a ride to a couple GI's who must have looked pretty down on their luck. Wearing our greens always did help us get a ride a little quicker. It was a lot easier back in 68 to start with.

"How about suicide?"

"It's a sin!"

"It's a right!"

"Why would you, son?"

"I wouldn't, Father. I have much to live for, but I shouldn't stop someone else."

"It's a sin to let someone else commit a sin."

"I have no right to interfere, Father. I'm a soldier. I work on a psych ward. I am paid and I am ordered to prevent suicides. I do my job, but today I'm on leave, and if someone wanted to end their life I have no right to stop them. That is their choice and only theirs!"

"That is their expression of pain in their suffering my son. Compassion obligates us to save someone's life so they can go on to redemption and save their own soul."

Bob always liked an emotionally stirring conversation, especial when it was someone else in the blender. It will be a long ride eastward.

A big sign set in a bigger stone stops the conversation. ARIZONA 89 NORTH, GRAND CANYON. We have arrived.

"Goodbye and thank you, Father."

"May God have mercy on you both."

The Datsun and the Father continue east, and like the steady whine of its engine, they are soon out of sight, but not out of mind. We check one of our packs at the Bright Angel lodge,

fill the other with two days supplies, and head into Bright Angel Fault, a smaller crevasse that feeds down into the Grand Canyon from the South Rim.

The view is absolutely spectacular. No photo can capture the immensity of this hole in the ground. The bottom is a mile down; the North Rim is twenty miles away. We gawk, we stare, we worship awestruck—nothing has prepared us.

We proceed down the narrow path into Bright Angel Fault, squeezing to the side to allow mules past, then swerving to avoid what the mules left behind. As we descend, the rim of the canyon replaces the sky. Light is reflected, refracted, jilted, and filtered by the multi-colored walls of the canyon. Everything takes on a pink hue from the light coming off the Kaibab sandstone. We reach Indian Springs and decide to camp. We set off looking for the enormous frogs we hear, only finding normal ones, and realize we are in the middle of a gigantic megaphone. We hoot and holler, shout and screech, answered only by our own echoes. We are alone. After more exploration, we lie down and let the night do its work as May 6<sup>th</sup> fades into the past and the 7<sup>th</sup> rolls into place.

Pink light reaches my drowsy eyelids and soon enough wakes me. More pleasant than yesterday's morning, for the first couple of minutes, I am put off by the pink light and the eerie quality the sound has down here. Bob has re-lit the fire. We eat, decide our gear is safe here, leave it, and think we will head to the Colorado River to bathe, then return to the campsite. Walking the gentle slope to the switchbacks, we see the Inner Gorge with the river crossed by two suspension bridges.

We get to the Colorado and decide we mustn't be all that dirty. Neither one of us has any inclination to bathe anymore. Bob picks up a stick and tosses it in. It's rushed away so fast we can't follow it with our eyes, as more brown, silty water rushes in behind it. Any fool who dips a toe in has a good chance of a bad death.

We cross one of the bridges and watch a construction helicopter plying materials into the Phantom Ranch. We head in that direction, buy a box lunch, and find a rocky peninsula where we can wash our feet after six days on the road from 'Frisco. We walk east to the other bridge, cross it back to the south side of the canyon, and proceed back to camp. A jet fighter swoops into the canyon and takes a peek, then thrusts menacingly, just enough to break the sound barrier and let off a sonic boom. We can hear it, feel it in our stomachs, and see it as pebbles rain down around us from a rocky purchase on the rim.

Bobby's eyes look kind of jaundiced, but we chalk it up to the sunlight, everywhere reflected from the Toroweap limestone that colors this environment. At camp everything remains untouched. We eat supper and contemplate walking out tonight to get a hotel room. The idea of sleeping in a bed after taking a bath in warm water appeals to us. We still have two thousand miles to go to reach New England. Bobby's urine is the color of dark beer. Hematuria. We now have confirmation that he does have hepatitis. Must have been that roast beef in our fridge back on Stanyan Street. Considering the crowd we hung around with in the Haight-Ashbury, it is not a surprise. I hadn't eaten the roast leftovers. Someone came home from the Army hospital without scrubbing their nails, deciding to make some food.

We vote for the hotel room, and we begin our ascent when normal people are eating dinner. We stop to rest on the way up, and our muscles instantly start to tighten from the cold. The rim is roughly six thousand feet above sea level, a little over a mile, and it's quite cold. We realize we can make it to the top, but we can't rest. I can handle it, and I can drag Bob the last few feet if he can't, and we press on. After what seemed like ages, at 11 pm, we crest the rim. We proceed to Bright Angel Lodge, get our pack out of the check room, and request lodging. They are full and send us to El Tovar. We start walking. Bob falls behind.

We hear the noises associated with a party in one of the settlements to our right. A door opens, people spill out into the night, figures run behind me. I keep truckin', head down, dogged, beat. Bobby yells in the background "Mike! Mikel!" A sharp stab of panic rings in his usually calm tone. I turn and see a park ranger peering over a low stone wall into the canyon, the abyss. I run to them. Bob asks the ranger, "Where do you want me to go for help?"

He replies, "You stay, I'll go for help," leaving us alone with the shadowy figure below, crawling towards the edge of the shelf under us, toward the fifteen hundred foot Kaibab sandstone cliff, and certain death. Bobby yells to me "Get out the rope!" and jumps over the wall, after her. I drop my pack, get the rope, and follow him into the night. A ten foot drop down to the heap of rubble sloping the shelf. Two figures struggle on the edge below. I clamp my fear of heights and seize control of my breathing. Crab-wise, I scuttle down to them. She weighs as much as Bobby and is fighting for her right to die.

Bobby is hysterical. Fatigued, scared, tangling over the edge of a cliff. Rubble rolls off around us and sends back no report of depth. There might as well be no bottom. I remember Bob telling me about fishing off the Oregon coast and landing large catch with help. I remind him of this. We grab her by the belt and fall backwards, keeping our centers of gravity, and the pit of our stomachs, away from the edge. Together we outweigh her, and she is drunk to boot. I find a bush growing from the rubble and get one end of the rope around her and one on the bush. She is snapping and biting at Bobby, "F--- you, white man. I say you tried to rape me!" We pull her sweatshirt up over her head to confine her teeth and arms. We are finally in control.

Noises above. A figure drops beside us, a friend. He is talking to her in Havausupai and playing with her exposed breasts. He's drunk too. Bobby and I look at each other, confirming that this did indeed just take place, and we aren't having a nightmare in Indian Springs. Suddenly the rim lights up above us. Ropes, slings, and rangers drop down beside us. She is trussed and hoisted out. The ropes return for us, as the wall is un-climbable. Eight of us load her, struggling, into an ambulance, and everyone leaves. We continue our walk to the El Tovar and check in. After baths, in our room, I say to him, "Don't f---ing argue with priests!" That night every time I fall asleep, I awake in a nightmare of falling. The next day wake up, thumbs out, Route 66, cleaner, closer to home.

~David Rainville

### Tophet

My face is pressed up against the glass looking in.  
All I can see is the reflection of you inside me,  
A combination of what we used to be.  
A time of bright days, the smell of spring, and smeared lipstick.

~Gerry Garcia



## In the Manner of Angels

The man was an unremarkable figure, cut from the overused mold of businessman; in a suit and tie. His shined shoes scuffed the dust at the side of the road. A briefcase weighed down his left side.

The nearest house was two miles down the road. A large red barn that spoke to age was close to the road on his right.

Only speculation could give an answer as to how this man came to be so far from where he naturally ought to be. Equally inexplicable was the rustle in the trees to his left, across the road.

As the man watched in stunned silence, a small figure stumbled out of the dense New England woods. The golden child was only six years old, with neat bangs shadowing her eyes.

Every element of the meeting unlikely, the two seemed to take it at face value. Never exchanging names, they fell in together for a mile or so. Chatting amiably about their respective lives, they traversed the sunny patch of road that stretched before them so far.

Finally, seeming to realize his current situation, the man hinted at the hour. Like a startled deer, the child bid the man farewell. Darting quickly across the road, she disappeared into the forest once more.

The man could not make out much of the child's direction, but it seemed to him that she was doubling back through the underbrush – back to where they had met.

I often wonder who he was. The meeting seemed in the manner of angels walking in the world, but if an angel appeared – was it he or I?

~Leah Jablonski

Smile when you see me. It matters not what you say, or what I reply. All I ask is that there be a moment at our every meeting, however brief, where all is right.

~Leah Jablonski

## Bean Sprout

*(For a bean sprout to flourish, it needs constant care and watering. When left alone, it will surely wither away.)*

When I walked on the street

I saw a blind man  
I thought how much he wanted to see the world

I saw a deaf man  
I thought how much he wanted to hear all sounds

I saw a dumb man  
I thought how much he wanted to talk to people  
He might have a lot of stories in his mind

All of a sudden, I cried on the street  
Because I felt how sad they were  
I am a similar person in a foreign country

It's hard to study a foreign language  
Especially after age forty  
But I wouldn't give up learning English  
Because the sadness of illiteracy is forever

The past time was difficult  
As for a half blind, deaf and dumb person  
Today, if I study more, with patience,  
Tomorrow I will be free living in a foreign country

I am a bean sprout  
I am a bean sprout  
I want to pour the water to myself  
Everyday....

~Mi ran Kim

## An Absinthe Drinker's Sobriety Test

"What do you know about pain?" he hissed in a laugh that sounded more like a child's sob than a man's amusement.

I didn't answer. I was almost shocked to laughter myself. What did I know about pain? I wanted to tell him that pain was my right hand, and I screamed it through my eyes. I wanted to tell him that I knew how pure, how honest pain was; that I'd seen the venomous face and found beauty there.

"Well?!" He snapped impatiently, swerving the car dangerously close to a tree as if in exclamation. "*You said you wanted to talk. So talk.*"

I was sure he felt bad—felt badly for throwing me into the door, felt badly about shaking my small frame too hard, for calling me a whore, for letting me crumple to the floor like a discarded rag doll.

Was it loyalty or indifference that kept his friends from getting involved? I had heard someone say I was making it worse; that I should've left him alone. I didn't want to leave him alone. It wasn't fair. How dare he become convinced of my unfaithfulness simply by the word of some wasted fourteen year old.

"*I want to talk, but I don't know what to say. I don't understand what I did,*" I murmured, fascinated by the rage radiating from his brown eyes.

Actually, I had a lot to say, but didn't even begin to articulate the waves of words I was choking on. This was the person I had longed to return my affection for the past three years? I realized that I had spent over one thousand days of my life working towards a winter morning when the ache of my heart would only be replaced by an ache in my arms. Repulsed by the place my desire had led me, I gazed through the dirty passenger side window, letting my thoughts glaze over lazily.

He would never know how I spent countless hazy hours locked in daydream, watching myself lay immaculate paper cranes atop the pillow I left on his bed. He would never know the oral origami I stitched into paper in dedication of my soulful thirst. However, in all my wisdom of his ignorance, it was I who was stretched between parody and paradox; for this kind of love was like biting a lemon.

"*Did I lay a finger on you?*" He growled in a low voice, glancing toward me, but without lifting his vision to meet mine.



One finger? Ten? The physical manifestation of my pain was nothing compared to the unshakable strangling trust I had embedded under his singeing, serpent skin. But I had been waiting for this. I wanted him to see, for it to send a sting through his body. Saying nothing, I rolled up my sleeve to expose one of the upraised bumps darkening on my arms.

*"That's nothing,"* he scoffed with a familiar joyless laughter.

I watched his face for any change in expression, when after a moment none came, I turned again to the window, wondering if he had been too drunk the night before to remember, or if he merely didn't want to believe he was responsible.

*"Why do you like me?"* he questioned finally, self-loathing soaking the words.

*"How do I answer that? I mean... you can't help who you care about."*

It was true after all. You can pretend, and hide, or force other faces into your mind, but theirs will haunt you like an ill-kept secret. After all, I, the girl who had cringed at red roses and the mention of sweet nothings, had grown accustomed to falling, tripping really, into romanticized fantasy at the mere whisper of this man's name. Yet even as he spoke those words, it occurred to me that while I assumed myself drunk off a love more intoxicating than the sweetest wine, it was absinthe I'd been drinking. This was no destiny; no young poet's star-inscribed lust. I had been fueled by habit, and circumstance, remaining either because I longed to gain the upper hand, or, if I was truly a good person, because I refused to be his most recent betrayal.

*"I don't know. Should I trust you? I can't decide? You decide for me."*

*"I already told you that you could trust me. Remember? You made me swear on my life."*

*"I'm not a happy person,"* he declared, pressing the gas just hard enough to make the SUV kiss the bumper of the van lucky enough to be driving in front of him.

*"Stop, okay? That's probably a mom driving."*

Annoyed at the driver's refusal to speed up, he began swerving again, slamming on the brakes when the wheels hit sand to make the car skid across the road.

He pulled slowly into my driveway, and in the silence of that lazy breathless instant in his car, I visualized my reflection in the absinthe glass; my blindness, the vessel of my own destruction, and his spiritual poverty, the liquid poison inside. I knew then I wasn't

meant to spend life mentally existing in a smoky bar, content to watch my nervous system disintegrate gracefully.

He hesitated, uncertain, managing to mumble, *"Okay, well, call me, sometime... if you want."*

*"Yeah, sure."*

As I climbed out of the car and walked dazed to my front door, I felt pathetically grateful for today. I finally believed that it would never work and I could at last be rid of this ghost of a passion that had long circled my loneliness. Once inside, I looked back to see his car disappearing down the road. I smiled sourly, the fading citrus burn pinching my cheeks in nostalgic farewell; this was my most joyous moment.

~Katherine Wool



## Lady Slipper

I sat there,  
until the last gurgle of water drained from the tub  
I sat there, naked  
with pink skin  
and blushing limbs  
folded up on the toilet seat  
like a clean towel  
thinking of you

~Eileen Torni

*inserts from the unfold:*  
E PLURIBUS UNUM

*"Now if there were two such rings, and the just man would put one on, and the unjust man the other, no one, as it would seem, would be so adamant as to stick by justice and bring himself to keep away from what belongs to others and not lay hold of it, although he had license to take what he wanted from the market without fear, and go into the houses and have intercourse with whom ever he wanted, and to slay or release from bounds whom ever he wanted, and to do other things as an equal to a god among humans."*

*Glaucou, from Plato's The Republic*

*Preface*

On Washington Street a couple of Suits stop below and look up at the hawk:

"They say they've been coming around hungry."

"Does it have a red tail? I think it has a red tail," a women replies.

"I did not know they were around."

The woman asks, "Is it building a nest? I think it's building a nest."

"No," the man says. "It's eating something. I think it's a rat."

The hawk surveys, grips its prize and floats away between buildings.

1

Above Dorchester a man grips at a blanket and pulls it tight around his shoulders. The sun has been gone for a week. He surveys the distance from him to the ground and says:

"I'm really messed up. That's why I want to..."

His tall companion, as of minutes, causally twirls a toothpick in his dirty hand. The cloudiness doesn't bother him. And neither does the morning wind. He's togged up in a green jacket (that doesn't fit) with a name sewn above the right pocket - but that doesn't matter.

"And how do you know this?" the tall man asks.

"You my shrink or something because you ain't look like one!"

"Just wondering, pal."

The man wrapped in the blanket looks over and down from the ledge at his companion and examines his jacket. The tall man realizes this and says, "Names not Franks but you can call me Frankie."

The man in the blanket looks up and contemplates the sky for a long moment, then says:

"Well ... shit ... ain't got no name ... Not no more."

## 2

"Hey, buddy, mind if I call you Buddy?"

No answer. Frankie went on: "You're shaking all over, man. Need a fix or something?"

"It's cold."

"Couple bennies? I might --"

"I told ya it's cold!"

"Right. Right. Gonna be a long winter -- I can smell it. That's really shitty, eh? They say the weather affects the mood."

"Guess I'm one of 'em." The man in the blanket says.

"Yep." Frankie went on, "No sun for weeks now. It's awful. That's 'cause them clouds are brewing up. Getting ready to blow. Say, that's a nice blanket. Pretty warm, eh? You'll need it."

Buddy pulls his blanket protectively. He only regards Frankie now and then. But most of the time staring off.

"I could maybe get you a couple caps. Maybe some charge, if you wanted to trade the blanket --"

"Forget it, alright!"

"Alright alright, I'm your friend, man, just trying to help."

"I ain't need any help! Wouldn't do. I told ya I'm messed up."

"Ya, right, I see. So how do you know you're messed up? Just curious, pal."

"Cause sometimes I'm screwed up and other times I think I'm damn crazy!"

Frankie thinks momentarily. Finally he says, "Well... there's a difference, y'know? When you're messed up you know it. When you're damn crazy you don't have a clue. By the looks of it," Frankie nods, "you're loco."

Then Frankie notices a tear running down Buddy's face.

"Well look," says Frankie, "I guess we're all screwed in some way. Like that man down there. On the street -- walking his dog -- he's screwed too in some way."

"I ain't think you understand."



"I think I do, Buddy. Every time I look in the mirror and see my father's nose I know I've been screwed."

"I told you already!"

A devious glare passes over Frankie's eyes. "Come on man, the world's screwed. See that smudge of a sun, up there, behind the clouds?" he points, "Y'know someday that thing will die. It'll turn into a red giant, swell past our orbit and turn us nice and crisp before it engulfs the whole damn system! What are we gonna do before then? Nothing. That's what we'll do. We'll put our heads between our legs and kiss our ass's goodbye! We're all screwed, you see? All the more reason to... to you know..." Frankie nods looking down over the ledge and looks back.

Buddy looks over his shoulder at Frankie. Frankie notes to himself how awful the man looks. Dirty and ragged like himself but real damn awful: real thin under the eyes, almost hollow like a ghost. Only place clean on his face was where the tear had dripped. Another tear was on the way.

Buddy examines Frankie's jersey professionally. Frankie looks down and begins to adjust a green plastic button. Agitation was in Buddy's voice, "You ain't talk like one of us. You ain't seen it. The way life been treated over there. You see something like that and it's in your eyes forever. And I ain't see it in yours."

"Well... Buddy old pal...you're right. I told ya my name wasn't Franks. But I can identify with you. I really can. I seen stuff. I seen a veteran sprawled out in an alley down yonder," he pointed with his thumb, "I gaped at him for a long time. Too bad. I swear he was just sleeping. His eyes were cracked and his skin gray. Veins all retreated. Just like a sack of bones. Really too bad. If I could switch places --"

"Shut up you damn honky! I remember 'em now. He was Franks, not you. You don't deserve that jacket! I knew him. You a shit. Shut up. If I ain't so weak I..." his words disappear into a harsh wind. He squeezes his eyelids tight but tears still manage to come.

"Look Buddy, we all gotta survive. You know no one gives a damn about us. None of them Suits never spend a cold night in their lives. They don't know nothin'. Getting a job and a shave isn't an option when the mind's been broken. "

Buddy's shoulders begin to shake. He sobs. They both shudder in the cold morning air.

Sobbing: "I know you gotta roll the sleepers to survive. I just ... I just ain't know what to think anymore! I feel so - shit - what am I telling you this for!"

"Go on, Buddy. It's alright."

"Is it though? You ever seen a big black man like me cry? I mean really losing his mind!" He sobbed, shaking his shoulders and sniffing.

"Oh, cut it out, Buddy. We all cry, man."

"I ain't never. Been years. Before the draft." Buddy wipes snot on his blanket.

Frankie waits for the sobbing to subside. No use talking to a sobbing man. All you get out of a sobbing man is anger. Frankie stares off into the buildings. Buddy stares off into the sky.

The wind blows for a couple minutes. The sun still hides behind rolling clouds. Their knuckles are chapped and sore. Buddy still shakes and continually wipes strings of green and brown snot on the blanket. Presently, Frankie props a knee up on the ledge, adjusts the toothpick in his mouth. He sees an object swoop over their heads. They both look as a hawk lands on the building across the street with something limp in its talons. The hawk proceeds to tear at its prize.

"There you go , Buddy. You're one or the other: the hawk or the rodent. And there isn't much in between."

"Evolution ain't give me no wings." Buddy shakes his head. "Ain't got no wings," and he looks down.

"Eh, I don't want them, Buddy old pal. You think that hawk doesn't have problems of its own, because it has wings? Why there's a whole other set of problems in the air. For one, it's not so clean. And secondly it doesn't have any trees. Nope. I don't want any wings. We're not hawks, Buddy ... But us rats, we know where to go."

"To hell."

"Maybe. Probably better than this place. But that's where you'll end up," Frankie points with the toothpick, "In someone's talons." He flips the toothpick back into his mouth, reaches in a pocket and withdraws a pack of Camel Lights but does not extract one. He leans on his knee. Buddy freezes under a cold hard sky.

Time passes with the morning. They watch the hawk together.

"Things feel out of control, eh?" asks Frankie.

No response.



"Y'know, if I were you I'd bring destiny to myself. I wouldn't muddle around in this hell-hole waiting to die."

Buddy lowers his head.

"You have to be an individual, Buddy. Don't carry water for no one. You see, it's easy to take sides because there's no thought involved. You can be a wheel in the big machine, like everyone else, or you can step outside of these neat little categories and take your life into your own hands. That brings destiny to you. And that puts you in control."

"You read that shit in a book somewhere?" Buddy said sardonically.

"Look Buddy, no one gives a damn about me. No one gives a damn about you. No one innately cares about anyone. Everyone acts out of self-interest, only doing the right thing when they feel compelled to do so, out of some beneficial motive. Do you see, Buddy? We're fodder for the capitalist pigs. Damn blood banks for the leeches. We're nothing, Buddy. Do you hear me -- nothing! We crawl around in the mud, in the belly of the beast. Slithering like rats without backbones. We're shit Buddy, nothing but shit! Look at you -- you ain't eaten in days -- you're hollow as a ghost. We don't have the bodies we used to. No more, nope. It's called entropy, Buddy. The one thing we can sure count on!" Frankie struggles to catch his breath. He looks down, slips a cigarette from its soft-pack and lights it while cupped in his hands. "Damn," he says ...

He inhales. In the process of his rant he did not notice that Buddy's eyes had swelled up badly and salty tears were now covering his face. Frankie exhales. With desire, he examines the blanket wrapped around Buddy. Then he looks up at Buddy's face. That poor bastard. What a wreck.

"You believe in Jesus, Buddy?"

No response.

"Well, Buddy ... he was either crazy or he was exactly who he said he was."

Nothing but sounds of sadness came from Buddy. He was completely broken and lost. Frankie saw this.

"Well, Buddy ... wouldn't it be nice ... to walk into his arms right now?"

The hawk rips into the rat.

They are nothing more than porch-screens to the wind. The clouds are dark and they move fast over the heads of Frankie and Buddy. It's increasingly cold and Buddy's legs are shaking. Frankie can see that he is overwhelmed with grief and sorrow and pain. He's in a state of confusion that is so great it obstructs all clarity. He's surely somewhere falling rapidly into a deep dark hole.

A second Camel Light is hanging in Frankie's face. Smoke is caught quickly and carried away as if it was not there. Frankie exhales and pulls the cigarette out, examining it indifferently. "You okay, Buddy? You don't look so good. I know a croaker down at Umass --"

"I-I don't n-need no croaker."

Frankie rolled the cigarette in his fingers. "I know you feel screwed, Buddy. We all feel screwed in the same way. Like, for some reason, you've been denied your piece of the pie. I know you feel violated and betrayed ... I'm sorry life isn't fair. It's not your friend and it's not your enemy. Life is life. What is -- is what is. And it's gonna do what it's gonna do."

Then, in a ghostly-neurotic manner, Buddy looks down at Frankie. Buddy's eyes are painfully shattered. The lids are thick and watery. Sunken from grief and poverty. Tears stain the face. He is empty and broken from head to foot. He looks into Frankie hard. He says weakly, "Y'know the d-dead moan when the sun heats up their vocal cords? I-I see those men in my dreams. I see them before the life pours out of their stomachs. I see those men! Ya hear. They call to me in my dreams! And I reach out --" Buddy shut his swollen eyes. His lashes drip and his whole face shakes. "I see them ... I try and I try and I try. Lord knows I try ..."

Frankie's eyes watch the blanket as Buddy lets go of it. It piles up against the ledge. Then Frankie's eyes follow Buddy's body as it falls forward ... down ... down ... down ... down ... till chunks of his skull and brains and blood spray across the hood of a parked car and across the road.

There are screams and yells and alarms ... that never came.

Frankie throws his cigarette down and snuffs it against the rubber roof top. He slips his toothpick from his pocket and sticks it between brown teeth. He then picks up the blanket and wraps it around him. Squeezes. Man, he thought, that feels better. At that moment, the clouds break and the sun stings Frankie's face and the sides of the buildings -- creeping into dark corners. He looks over, his dark eyes twinkling, at the building across the street.

The city hawk was finished with its meal. The feathers ruffling in the wind.

Frankie blinks. When his eyes open, the hawk is gone. He smiles. He turns -- whistling the National Anthem as he walks off -- disappearing into the belly of the beast.

~Aaron Ufema  
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## My Prison

I stroked the brush against the canvas  
letting the paint soak into the fabric.  
Blacks and grays washed over each other  
until in darkness the fabric was smothered.  
I studied the finished painting trying to find what it was that made  
it look so real, so raw, so sad.  
A face it was, hidden in the shadows of a dark world.  
A face full of disease, despair.  
The sorrowful eyes cried out in desperation  
silently screaming, crying, bleeding.  
A woman, it was, a woman trying to push her way out of the  
painting, trying to leave this desolate world of damnation.  
In this maze of madness.  
I imprisoned this poor creature in a world of agony.  
She did not deserve this, or did she?  
I stared at the face.  
The face was horribly familiar.  
I stood silently screaming  
trapped in the darkness of my own creation. My prison. My  
painting.

~Berecca Anne

## For Once Then, Something

The beautiful young couple was walking through the leaves on a crisp, late autumn afternoon. For a while, neither had said anything, and yet they both knew they had the same thing on their minds. The events of the previous night were a turning point in their relationship. For better or worse, something was about to change.

As the late afternoon turned to dusk, the moon slowly rose up over the naked trees. A cool breeze rustled the dry leaves around them. What seemed like an eternity of silence was broken when Alyssa stopped and turned to her lover. With the pale moonlight reflecting off of Tom's face, she saw a tear streaming down his cheek.

She whispered, "No, don't. I do love you."

With that, Tom looked into her eyes. And for the first time he saw her soul. For once then, something....

~Andrew Kolodziej

Anxiously by my phone  
Wondering if it will ever ring.  
The cold silence that fills my room unsettles.  
My heart races like a cheetah.  
My palms drip with sweat.  
My stomach plummets to the ground.  
Oh, how I have waited for this moment.  
Finally, I hear that noise from the wall;  
Silence consumes my body, and  
I am unable to say a word.  
Quickly, I put the phone down  
Then sit and wait for it to ring again.

~Stacie Tanzella



# The S-Train

## *Part One*

This story begins at the back of a train, the S-train into the city square to be specific. But this is no ordinary ride like most people have experienced, this is a descent into the uncharted depths of human madness. The passenger (as we will call him) has just awakened up from a nightmare, unaware of where he is, or how he got here.

The passenger stumbles to his feet from what seemed like an eternity sleeping in the fetal position. His limbs are sore and bruised from an unknown battle in his sleep. The cold seat on which he was sleeping gave no comfort to his body or mind. As he stood up he studied his surroundings. "A train? But how could this be?" he mumbled to himself as he straightened out and cracked his knuckles. "Hello?" he said aloud, but no one answered. He looked around as the lights flickered on and off from inside the train cabin, no other person was there, he was alone.

"It seems I have come to be.... In a place that is quite unfamiliar to me," he rhymed this to himself over and over. A glance out of the train windows gave him some relief from the confusion. "I know where I am, but I don't ever remember a train coming through here," he spoke to himself. He recognized the city, it had been his home all his life, a home not easily forgotten. He could remember this was his home, but his own identity was a mystery to him. He reached for a wallet, but found none. No identification, or pictures, or keys on him. "Maybe I was mugged and beaten and left for dead in this place...."

Looking to the front of the cabin he saw a door, and to the back of the cabin, one more door. Now that his limbs were fully movable, he walked to the front of the cabin and opened the door. And with a step that he thought would lead him into the next cabin, found no floor to rest upon. He fell, but gripped the doorway, which was his only safety from slipping into the black abyss he stared at. An utter pitch-black void waited to devour him whole, and the shrieks of what seemed like thousands of human and animal screams reverberated in his head. He pulled himself back into the train and slammed the door with a thud. Silence fell.

## *Part Two*

After taking a near fall into what would have been certain doom, the passenger finds himself contemplating his next move.

Walking back and fourth, up and down the aisle, the passenger entered deep thought. "This does not make sense. How can this be the back of the train when there is only nothingness ahead of me?" He paused and looked at the opposite door at the back of the cabin and began to randomly mutter to himself. "Maybe the only way to go forward is to take a few steps backward." He walked towards the back of the cabin, his hands sweaty from the stress of the decision he was about to make. Slowly, he opened the door.

He would rather fall into an abyss than stay for one more minute in this train; he closed his eyes and took a step forward, or was it backwards? His foot landed heavy on the cabin floor, the sound echoed throughout the metal interior of the train, then he opened his eyes. What he saw horrified him. Hundreds, maybe thousands of eyes stared into his. Only eyes could he see in the darkness of the cabin, no bodies to put together with all the pairs of eyes. Eyes coldly staring into his own.

"WHO ARE WE?" one of the pairs of eyes seemed to speak aloud to the passenger in a chilling voice. "I don't know, I swear I don't" the passenger screamed as the eyes closed in around him. "We are the ones who have stared at you all through your life, mocking, making fun, pushing and shoving you!" "Yes, we are a part of your undoing!" another voice spoke aloud. These were the eyes that have stared at the passenger all through his life, every look and glance he received, every hateful stare, or lustful wanting, every look of affection and hatred. The eyes were all upon him now. "Let me pass now!" he shrieked. "You have ignored us all your life, all the opportunities you missed from your own ignorance, this is your doing, and we are burning in your mind forever!"

"No, it was my own choice to ignore those who stared at me, it was my decision to be alone!" His memory slowly started coming back to him and he closed his eyes and began to cry. As he opened them, like stars blanketed by a cloud at night, the eyes had vanished. "Alone again" he muttered. He firmly put a foot forward, then another, until he reached the next door.

### *Part Three*

"How in the world could I hope to change?" The short sentence swept through his mind, like water flowing in a dark river. He stepped through the metal doors into the next cabin; the boots he wore made loud thuds as he strode towards the center of the moving room. Leaks in this cabin seemed common, as puddles were being formed beneath him on the dirty floor. Amid the thudding and splashing of his boots he noticed his reflection in the dark pool forming. He stood with his head bowed, staring at the image that stared back. There was not a single ripple in the puddle, for the water had stopped leaking in. The picture was as clear as a mirror, and he saw the bruises on his battered body. "What has happened to me; my sweetest friend?" He spoke the words to his own reflection, like he expected a response.

A loud ping, like metal hitting metal, distracted him for a few seconds. Nothing to see that could have been the cause of the noise, just empty space. He turned his head back down to once again fixate on his own visage. Nothing! His reflection had disappeared from the dark water at his feet, and all that remained was shrouded. He bent down and started to contemplate whether he should touch the water, his hand frozen only inches above the cold uncertainty. Before he had a second more to think on his act, the train cars suddenly began to stop. He lost his footing and fell straight onto the puddle. Instead of smacking against the floor of the car, he fell right into what seemed like an endless, watery grave. "Anything is better than that car," he thought, as he started swimming downward into the void.

His lungs became heavy as the urge to breathe air became stronger, but he pushed on, further down into the dark pool. Just as his lungs began to reach the breaking point, just as he was going to let the water take him down to his fate, he noticed a light above in the distance. "This better not be heaven," he thought to himself. He swam as fast as his body could until he reached the surface. Making a huge splash as he surfaced, he gladly took in the fresh air that awaited his sore lungs. "Daylight, its daylight!" He laughed as the radiant rays and the fresh air overtook him. He was no longer a passenger with an unknown future, he knew what he must do. He silently stared at the lands spread out before him, as he waded to the shore.

~David Blais



Darkness stains his years,  
Yet still he fights  
And struggles on.  
There is blood mixed with his tears;  
One battle is over...  
The war rages on.

Despite the pain he fights his fight  
Though beaten down,  
He stands again.  
Never knowing what is right,  
He burns with the hope  
That fate will be his friend.

As years march by he stands alone,  
And bears the pain  
With head held high.  
And so this vagrant with no home  
Will search  
Till the day he dies.

~Mitchell Collins

## Death Threats and Pizza Sauce

The first time I received a death threat at work I was shocked. I actually thought some guy was going to come down to the pizza house with a sawed-off shotgun. It was early in my career at one of America's only legal sweatshops —churning out pizzas for the factory workers — that I screwed up taking an order for some sweaty, bald, angry man. I was still learning the menu and I screwed up, what more can I say. This guy comes in to pick up his order and upon realizing my error becomes even sweatier. My boss says to take it easy because I'm new. The sweaty man then shouts "Next time you hire someone make sure they checked off the moron box on the application!" I don't remember if I was hurt by this statement or if I ended up laughing hysterically, Probably the former, then later, the latter. The sweaty customer then went on to say that if he ever had a group of kids for a soccer team, or whatever, he would option to go to our competitor Tool Town Pizza instead. Without thinking I shouted, "They let you near kids?" Thinking back that probably was my second mistake that day. He then yelled something along the lines of "I'll kill you, you little punk."

I was worried for about a week but when the guy never came back my fears subsided.

The second time I received a threat, although this one not of the death kind, was about a year later. I try to average one per year; I like to keep up a quota. It was a woman from "the ghetto," a dilapidated, old apartment building just past the center of town, next to the casket factory. You have to enter through the back door because the front is boarded up. It's home for the pregnant fifteen year old run-away-high-school drop-outs, and their crack dealing lovers. I believe Jerry Springer and Oprah used to siphon several guests from there. Well, this woman in apartment five, who has to use the phone in apartment nine to call us, refuses to accept the fact that she can't get a Fisherman's platter delivered in twenty minutes. The Fisherman's platter being the biggest pain in the a-- to cook because it is a mixture of several different kinds of fried fish. I tell the women several times that it takes twenty minutes to cook the food alone. She tells me she used to work in a restaurant and knows how the "system" works and that were all just too lazy. I get mad, and say, "Listen lady, you want a delivery in twenty minutes call f----- Dominos!" Slam down receiver. See also: storm out back door and kick the dumpster. She then calls back

and screams at my manager and informs her that she will call back every day until I'm fired. The next day my boss tries to talk to her on the phone and ends up hanging up on her as well. He then tells me to be careful because you never know what kind of psycho is on the other end of the line.

Finally, the most recent threat, last month, was from a drunk named John. I call him John because his girlfriend looks like a hooker from "the ghetto." John and his girl come in every Thursday night drunk off their asses and give us a hard time. He's a perfectionist with his order and always manages to find something wrong with it, and because of this we stopped trying to please him a long time ago. This particular night his "woman" ordered a Fisherman's platter for herself, a favorite amongst residents of "the ghetto" and some chicken fingers for her "man." When the order is finished and I'm totaling the price, John asks for some extra tar tar sauce. So I go out back and fetch it for him. Upon returning he asks for some salt for his fries, so again I go fetch it for him. I return with his salt and he wants some ketchup packets. I retrieve the packets and am subsequently out of breath. Finally he asks for some sweet and sour sauce. Because I again do not want to walk out back I tell him it's already in with his chicken. He pays and leaves. Ten minutes later the phone rings.

Me: "Athol Pizza"

John: "Yeah, how ya doin?"

Me: "Fine."

John: "Good...now listen you little s---, I asked for some f--- sweet and sour sauce and I didn't get any f--- sweet and sour sauce.

Me: "All right sir, you don't need to use such foul language," as if I actually care whether he does or not.

John: "I'll use whatever f--- language I want you little p----; you're lucky I don't come down there right now and f--- kill you."

Slam down receiver, see also: storm out back and kick the dumpster.

I'm still terrified of that guy, but I also wonder if he can even recall the event. In any case our policy is to hang up on unruly people.

But life will go on and I'll keep churning out pizzas for the factory workers until the day I'm fired for being a jerk to the customers, because you know what? They are never right.

~Jared Robinson

## Beauty

Sometimes something's true.  
There doesn't need to be a reason.  
Why is it what you know so well won't beg for understanding?  
Why can't it just be true?  
Why do you need faith or thought?  
Why am I afraid to simply smile?  
Why would my ways get in my way?  
When rain won't make the flower's colors run.  
When you can see the same distant nebula shine.  
When she's always right in front of you  
And you don't possibly know all her color or light...

~John Beaulieu

Conquer  
(the wild bird that flies away)

Now you have a walker  
with tennis balls for shoes  
great, wild spirit I so long have looked up to  
with my young and thirsty eyes  
spirit that never could be captured, that never  
wanted to taste  
the bitterness of metal, that never wanted to feel  
the certainness of death  
and how can I look at you now  
and not die a little more inside  
just as you do  
withering, slumping, that great fire that once  
stood up to all the cruel forces of the world, and said,  
come and fight me  
how can I not grieve,  
at the decaying state of your body and the lost state of your mind  
once you were beautiful, a wild lily, an untethered vine  
that could climb its way up anything  
and once you were that wild horse, snorting,  
bending and arching and tasting the sky with your feet  
denying the rope  
that was to fall around your neck  
now every time I look at you, those eyes that grow dimmer,  
I miss even more, that wild fire that once blazed white and  
immortal  
the tears wet my soul, so many nights,  
so many long and desperate nights, and I long  
how I long  
for those times of easy living and light laughter  
you know, dad, you are always that first spring flower  
pushing up out of the dark mud, kissing the unclothed world  
with a burst of tangerine color  
you will always be the wild horse I see in my dreams, that follows  
me  
along the side of the road  
how I long for you again, and yet I realize, you've been there all  
along  
just hidden behind the bars  
that have been unable to conquer you

~Eileen Torni



## Winter

I enjoy winter. Winter doesn't care what people think it is. Winter isn't death. Winter is the ideal of rest personified by an act of sustained intensity. Winter is beautiful, like you.

I'm writing this piece directly to you. Other people are going to read this, but the only way I can justify saying these things is to picture your face reacting. Thank you for yourself and what you do for me.

Thanks to you, romanticism isn't this big contrast to the rest of my nature. When I'm around, you can be romantic and comically cynical at the same time. I'm happy while not putting myself aside. This sounds a lot like a teenager's ideal. But please trust me that I put all of those away long before the songs I loved had to make any sense.

You were never an ideal to me. A dream? Maybe, but never an ideal. I'm not going to limit you with definition this way. It seems more like you're the art of humanity, completely unlike a painting or statue. I do respect the art of sculpture in a way. It's the one art form where you can only create through destruction. You take what's just there and break it into a shape. The complexity and the simplicity are existing in one shaded moment. The light inside impurity. This is how experience lets me see you. And if others can't see what I do, then I welcome the bend or perversion that's given me this view. I refuse to call it a flaw.

Thanks to you, I've given up the fantasy of comic book intensity. My most romantic idea is no longer kneeling in gathering snow, being covered and later springing out swinging a blunt weapon, a war hammer or heavy nunchacha to act as the hero. I've grown. I don't feel the pull to be what I'm not. I don't need to be a hero now.

I'm thanking you today for being more than anything that could be planned or intended. I'm thanking you for making me want to throw something downward, to add my strength to the inevitable gravity. You're like a song. You're like the patience of winter.

~John Beaulieu

## Another Change of Season

It's the first storm of autumn. We're supposed to get plenty of rain – maybe an inch or two, but the warm, harsh winds could cause some damage.

This doesn't frighten me.

It's beautiful to me.

The sunless damp sky, and the sound of howling winds bring me to a place deep within.

I feel calm and at ease.

From my bed I gaze through an open window, and I watch as the white curtains billow with every burst of wind.

Through the screen, I can see a line of trees bright with autumn's reds and yellows, and the green grass with scattered brown patches against a dark gray sky.

I go to the window, and place my hand on the screen to feel the wind.

I fall into a world that's safe. Where visions are filled with a wonderful fate – filled with hope – filled with true love.

Later I awaken to the sight of those colorful leaves falling to the ground beneath the trees.

A tear streams down my face. How I dread that winter is near.

The darkness drowns out the voice in my soul. The sadness leaves me cold and trapped with nowhere to go.

I search for the beauty, but all I can see are empty trees staring back at me. I tell myself when the warm sun returns the lifeless trees will grow their beautiful leaves.

The wait is so long though. Months will go by that feel like years.

I lay on my bed, and wrap myself around my pillow. I close my eyes, and imagine that I can fly, and be where the leaves never die, and the sun always shines.

But my reality is not that way. It's not that way.

~Ellen McGahan

*Inserts From the Unfold:*  
**Man in the Moon**

Lunar Gazing Sitting Under a Tree:

She said to the sky:

“Well ... since you asked ... I don’t really wonder where you are ... I just wonder what you’ll do when you get back: shine or sit behind a cloud. Do you ever think about that? I’m sorry. I know you have a lot to think about ... Anyway, you did say one day we’d have a baby. That would be a nice thing to do together. I don’t know how we’d find time. Shouldn’t we have our time first? I know you wouldn’t mind. It was my idea to have a baby anyway. It’s just that -- well -- you’re not getting any younger. But I don’t care about babies, anyway.

“We *could* have a baby. That would be fine. It might complicate you’re life, interrupt the cycle. I don’t know. But we haven’t kissed in a while. I can’t have a baby when we haven’t even kissed in a while. It was on my mind then. I guess it’s on my mind now.

“That night I saw your moon-mats on the floor. Yes, moon-mats is what you look like. At that time of night, anyway. Real late, you know? Almost like you’re ready to go to sleep. You were the shape of the window. The one on my wall and looking out was like looking in: there was me. I could see you -- big and bright and handsome -- and then just me. That’s okay. I understand. You’ve got a long cycle. But sometimes between those four walls -- windows or not -- things don’t look so good.

“But it’s only the beginning. And in the beginning I should only worry about kisses and not babies. Funny. It’s easy to be passive in the beginning. Easy to shake it all off into the daylight. Its easier in the beginning to tell myself that it *will* get better. But I’m sure you’ve seen it dozens of times: how things grind out till you’re all thin like a silver sliver.

“I remember my eyes were open and I was meditating on

such and such. You know, all the stupid things I think about, don't you? But they're not stupid. Why they're as bright as you are, way up there in the sky. I remember swearing to myself that you had passed my window seven times that night. In and out of my life in seconds. All the time.

"I wish I could reach up and cup you in my hands and keep you there forever. But I know it won't happen. Do you know how many times I thought: when will you be home? Not where are you or what are you doing. Just when. I always listen for you to tip-toe up the stairs. I think: soon he may slip into bed. Maybe even a kiss ... You are very silent when you come. Even the agility when we hike on warm Sunday nights is peculiar. It's striking and mysterious! All the things I see in you. Like you're ... out of the design. When will we hike again? The mountain is always enchanted. But somehow I know the answer. I try to look inside and all I see is clouds."

There was no replay. They were both silent in their different designs.

Crater Faced:

On the way home he wrote:

At the end of the night my face feels like a dry crater. All day on the move and every day the same old cycle. What last bit of light I have depletes as soon as I walk in the door. Then it's day again. I don't think she could possibly understand unless I fall apart like a piece of rock streaming through the atmosphere. I don't expect her to understand. Am I the only one intimate with a mental inertia? I mean, do you *really* know what that feels like? I'm a dust collector. She's a bright star shedding light on us both.

But the back of my eyelids feel like sandpaper. There's dry sweat on my skin (sticky like a clam). I'm weary. I'm tired. I need sleep. Haven't slept for days. I haven't even eaten since when ... But sleep. Yes. It seems to be the only thing on my mind. How I desire to shut my eyes under a shrouded sky. I would shine like a big round bulb after a good night's sleep.

So many times I don't even remember walking up the stairs. I'm in a constant idle like the walking dead. But I always check as soon as I walk into the bedroom. And she's there every time, waiting. I always glance. I never forget her -- perfectly placed -- under a single summer sheet. Almost as though she came with the mattress: a perfectly painted



picture with distinct lines and a contrast between her and the shadows.

But then, as I shed my clothes, and lay the jacket over the corner chair, I become overwhelmed with fatigue. And stumble into pillows.

I do love her. She's a diamond. She's the simplest smartest person I ever met so I married her. I love her humor -- her passiveness -- there's understanding between us about me. Sometimes. Sometimes we're just passing orbs in the sky. Like the sun and the moon. In and out of her life in seconds. All the time. And we're left without design. I want to say, we'll find time. But I don't think I have the strength at the end of the day to say it. I have so much to think about. I want to say, It'll get better. But I don't say it because I'm too busy sweeping the dust off the floor of my soul.

I do love the way she smells when I stumble into bed. Like soap. Clean. And she breathes ever so quietly, ever so deeply like every breath counts for something bright and meaningful. She really tortures me.

That's what I need: something meaningful in my work. Not this mindless boggling cycle. I'm so tired. Sometimes I think I'm in the business of losing my mind: Mortgage. Car. Insurance. Taxes. Bills. Bills. Bills. I've grown thin like a silver sliver.

I know she'll be awake. She always waits. I'll unfold into bed dragging my skin with me. She tortures me because she's so bright and warm and ... but then I'm lost in the mountain of pillows where I slip off to a quiet stream to drink. But I feel her in my sleep. I feel the window on the wall behind her and I feel the moon beyond it all ...

### Delicate Designs:

Is he going to touch me? It's late. I know. I want to look over but he'll know I'm awake. He probably already knows -- he always does (the anticipation squirms inside). He's so mysterious. An attractive quality in a man at first. But not one desirable to live with. Like camping high in the mountains where the moon is a no-show, she thought.

There was a lapse in gravity as he fell into bed. A little deeper and she would accidentally slide into him -- like an eclipse.



There would be no choice at that point. He'd have to touch her. Even if it was just to push her away.

She listened to his breath on the pillowcase for a long time. I want him here next to me, she thought. He's here now -- and yet -- a wall grows from the sheets. I'm sleeping with a ghost, she convinced herself. Eventually the erg wanted to jump out of her skin and grip his face and look into it like she looked into the moon. She wanted to satisfy a simple longing. A longing to bring them together even if it cost them a day and a night.

She thrashed and burned inside but with immaculate control it subsided. She couldn't help but wonder, what does he want? He works long and hard and comes home and goes to bed. What it must be like to crash and burn every night? In and out of my life in seconds. All the time. To sleep. I should check his head for a metal door. But I know things have to be this way. We are different creatures that act as enemies for the same cause. But I don't like it. And I've decided that I don't have to like it. I have a storm in me for him. More than that. I have massive earthquakes in my heart for him, but I can't say them and he can't listen. I want us to go skinny-dipping. I want us to look at the sky and stand in the rain. I want us to whirl in a snowstorm atop a great big mountain and Laugh and dance wildly. And if he would just touch me -- I would feel all of it at once. I *still* would.

"What is it you want then?" she said softly.

"So you're not asleep," he breathed.

"No. I want to know what you want."

"Sleep."

"No. Answer me. I want a real answer. Talk to me like you like me or something." He moved his leg. His toes raced against the summer sheet (a sliding noise). He sighed. What does she want? he asked himself. I love her. But I'm too tired. Worn out. I don't feel like talking so deeply.

"You never like talking deep, do you?" she asked as she turned to his back.. It was a very muscular back where the shadows gathered. Over his shoulder she saw his uniform, his jacket, draped over the chair by a far window. How strange and far that jacket was in any light, any position, any night.

She doesn't know she's pushing a tired man, he told himself. He prodded for something that he could say that would be compassionate and in the same end the conversation abruptly but gently...

I can't blame him but I can't wait. I have to know what he really wants -- right now -- this moment! Just coexist or what? If he tells me, I'll shut up. I'll sink between this mountain of pillows and he can sleep.

He mumbled something. She asked what.

"Did you feed the cat?" he said.

Is he serious? she thought and said, "We don't have a cat. I'm not that dumb. I won a spelling-bee once. Answer me!"

He chuckled inside. "Been thinking?"

She rubbed her naked belly with long nails:

"Don't be sarcastic. I'm not just pretty."

"You're very pretty."

"Listen, I don't know a lot of things. But I know a lot about one thing."

He waited for the rest of the sentence but nothing came. He could feel her gaze burning into his back.

I really need to sleep. "Well...?" he finally, faintly asked.

"I know a lot about what I want. And I asked you a question."

Finding energy, he rolled over and found her face. Noted its roundness, very German. Fiery eyes, pointed at the chin, beautiful. He felt wrinkled and old.

"I want what all Americans want," he said looking at her, "A house. A dog. Maybe even kids...when I'm promoted."

She smacked him on the chest. It was red even before the echo vanished.

"Ouch!"

"Insight please!" she said. "I don't want this psychobabble crap. I want a real answer. I want to know what you really want!"

She was serious. Like a dead planet he realized this. And he knew he wouldn't sleep till he gave her an honest answer. What do I want? What do I want? he thought. A lot to ask of a tired man. He found her eyes. Okay, I'll tell you what I want...

The moon suddenly-mysteriously found his eyes. She saw a deep blazing moon. Those suddenly deep blazing eyes, she would reflect on later: now she was frozen. He did not blink. And it seemed she heard every word before they actually slipped off his tongue. He said:

"If you were stripped down to nothing... stripped of

everything that ever belonged to you, your whole life, everything and everyone, what *then* would you have to offer the world?"

Her expression completely changed without really changing. It was softer but rather perplexed. All she did was unfold her tongue and open her mouth to say nothing.

He interrupted the process, "That's what I want. I want that one thing. That one small thing that I could give to the world after being completely stripped naked of life and everything in it. That's what I want out of life. And I just want to know what it is without having to learn what it is." He rolled over, folded himself in the sheet, pulled at it.

Her naked body was now exposed. There was a coldness, like a black hole, and there was no sheet. Her whole body was glowing in the moonlight. She was surprised: it wasn't what she expected. She was disappointed and felt dumb.

She didn't move. Her face turned away. She was thoughtful. After a while she turned to him, as if to say something -- but nothing.

Some time passed. His back said sleepily, "How about you?"

With a tilt in his direction, she breathed and said:

"I just want you to touch me."

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## Late night

This late at night you can hear a junkie's scream  
But I doubt that you'll hear her salvation  
Salvation so rarely has a sound  
But I can tell you it doesn't have a man's voice  
Men can only speak of mortal things  
Those who say more are lying

~John Beaulieu







